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SUBJECT: FOR RELEASE: OMAN: FAST, POSITIVE REACTION TO RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM REPORT

¶1. On Wednesday, October 28, Oman's state and private media carried uncharacteristically speedy and strongly positive coverage of the Tuesday, October 27 release of the 2009 International Religious Freedom Report. Coverage in all dailies predictably focused on the IRF's positive tone regarding the Sultanate, with most in both Arabic and English front-paging their coverage under headlines such as "American International Religious Freedom Report Praises Omani Tolerance" (youth-oriented private Arabic daily "Al-Shabiba", circulation 20,000) and "HM [His Majesty], Sultanate Praised" (private English daily "Times of Oman", circulation 25,000).

¶2. Most coverage drew on reporting from the Washington bureau of the state Oman News Agency (ONA), while private Arabic daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) supplemented that article with one from AFP. "Al-Shabiba" carried both the ONA story in full and additional excerpts of highlights from the Oman portion of the IRF. The ONA report, bylined by a local stringer, was also filed to the UAE-based English daily "Khaleej Times." Additional local coverage, and possibly some editorial content, is likely to appear over and immediately after the upcoming local weekend.

¶3. COMMENT: This rapid, broad response to the IRF release is a clear signal of local appreciation of the report's recognition of Oman's traditions (within limits seen to be prescribed by Islam) of religious freedom, tolerance, and encouragement of interfaith dialogue. END COMMENT.
Schmierer